Growth moves us forward.

North Raleigh UMC Family,

Jesus teaches us in the Gospel of John that our connection to him is as close as a branch on a vine:

"I am the vine, and my Father is the vine grower... Abide in me as I abide in you. Just as a branch cannot bear fruit by itself unless it abides in the vine, neither can you unless you abide in me. I am the vine, you are the branches. The one who abides in me and I in them bear much fruit, because apart from me you can do nothing." John 15:1, 4-5

This issue of Compass is about moving forward, and how one of the best ways we can do that is to intentionally seek to stay connected to Jesus, the source of life, to live "an extraordinary life."

Melissa Auten invites us to contemplate the Special Session of the General Conference with a new set of "eyes," in her article Change Is an Inside Job. We are challenged to face old problems in a new way by staying close to the risen Jesus.

One way to stay close to Jesus is to share in the compassion of our Lord. Compassion means to "suffer with." Gordon Bell offers a Disaster Recovery Team update about helping one family move forward, while Jack Bartle and Julie Miller share how the compassionate ministry of cancer support impacts lives of cancer survivors and draws them close to the source of life!

Barbara Bays introduces us to Pardoned by Christ, a powerful ministry supporting persons transitioning into the future after being in prison. We support this ministry from funds raised during our Generosity Campaign that designates 4% of pledges to go to missions.

Frances Kunstling and Lawrence Stewart share about a group of people that work behind the scenes to document our life together as a community of faith.

The practice of intentionally setting aside time to grow in our relationship with God is discussed by Melissa Auten and myself as we share about the ministry of Spiritual Direction. Stephanie Jares, Meg Clark, and Joanne Wise talk about the spiritual power of the Not Your Mama's Women's Retreat.

Finally, the Youth Ministry Council celebrates the participation of our confirmands in Confirm '19, a retreat at Lake Junaluska. These youth are taking their next steps toward Christ, and we celebrate them living in community because all of us take responsibility for one another in our Christian walk!

"I am the vine, you are the branches. Abide in me and I will abide in you." Read about these ways in which we intentionally connect to the source of all life, moving us forward so that we may reflect the light of Christ in our lives.

Grace and Peace,

Duke Lackey, Senior Pastor

ENCOURAGING PEOPLE ON THEIR JOURNEY TO DISCOVER EXTRAVAGANT LIFE IN CHRIST

COMPASS is the magazine of North Raleigh United Methodist Church.

CONTRIBUTORS: Duke Lackey, Melissa Auten, Gordon Bell, Jack Bartle, Julie Miller, Barbara Bays, Frances Kunstling, Lawrence Stewart, Stephanie Jares, Meg Clark, Joanne Wise, Jen Haselden, James Hughes, Kirsten Ioss, Geoff Mueller, John Owen, Kelly Schoch, Karin Reed, Melissa Muir.

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ON THE COVER: At our First Wednesday Fellowship Dinner on May 1, members packaged (and sampled) approximately 15,000 meals for Rise Against Hunger, a non-profit organization that is trying to end world hunger by the year 2030.

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We have been members of NRUMC since 1995. Our church community has always been such an integral part of my life. Through the years, Sunday School, Vacation Bible School, youth ministries, the church preschool, and our Special Needs Ministry have all been fulfilling. Recently, the Stephen Ministry program, Monday morning Bible Study, Backpack Buddies, Care Writing Ministry and our new cancer support group have all been where I have devoted my time.

I was diagnosed with an advanced, incurable form of Non Hodgkins Lymphoma known as Follicular Lymphoma in June, 2016. At that time, my oncologist at Rex/UNC Hematology/Oncology explained everything in a clear, reassuring way. A nurse educator presented us with a thick binder filled with information specifically devoted to my condition and spent several hours in a one-on-one patient education session. I had always tried very hard to lead a healthy lifestyle, so this diagnosis caused me to feel quite perplexed and frightened. The medical staff reassured me that nothing I had done had led to this disease. Scientists are hard at work researching this cancer to find its direct cause, yet a cure is still elusive. I have finished my 2 ½ year first line course of treatment that included chemotherapy and immunotherapy. This disease will relapse numerous times, and will require more difficult treatments in the future.

As soon as I requested prayer support in the summer of 2016, I received countless cards, emails, meals, and many rides to and from church meetings, and quiet coffee and lunch gatherings. Susie O’Dell, a Rex employee at the time, came to visit me in the chemo suite to offer prayer and support. When our new pastors arrived, they realized the need for a support group especially for cancer patients. Ashley offered to lead this group and I am so very grateful for her vision, thoughtful organization, and support. In a large church with many different needs, this group provides a very special niche. Cancer can be a very scary and sometimes lonely journey. In our group, we have gathered for prayerful support for each other, as well as for some practical and educational tips. We have hosted two dietitians. Janet Striegel and Sue Haney have attended to represent Stephen Ministry. We have shared book recommendations. And finally, we have had a place to love and pray for one another.

Last year, Melissa Auten visited our group and led us in a session on contemplative prayer. She shared a passage from Isaiah 45:2-7. Please take the time to read and reflect on this passage. I am so grateful to Melissa for sharing these reassuring words with our group. During uncertain times, we can all be assured that God is with us always.

Julie Miller
I was diagnosed with high-risk prostate cancer and received aggressive treatment four years ago. I am happy to say that I have been in remission now for three years. After treatment I joined a cancer support group at Duke to help others dealing with that dreaded disease. While attending those meetings for several years, it occurred to me that something was missing. That something was a spiritual component that for obvious reasons was not part of our discussions in a public forum. Last year, I asked Ashley if we could start a cancer support group here at North Raleigh and provide that very important spiritual component to those in our congregation dealing with all types of cancer. She was very receptive to the idea and has headed up this mission for North Raleigh. God has blessed us with her devotion. Since the formation of our group, we have seen and ministered to a broad spectrum of cancer survivors, those in treatment and their caregivers. Caregivers play a critical support role at that stage in one's life. I can tell you that the instant you receive that diagnosis, your life will change. Therein lies the reason for our support group—to help others dealing with all the anxious moments that lie ahead with treatment, and of course, the anticipation of a favorable outcome.

Our group provides a compassionate place to share your personal experiences if you wish to or simply listen and feel comfortable knowing you are not alone and there are others going through the same situation you are. If group participation is not for you, we have a dedicated staff of Stephen ministers who can provide one-on-one support. The most important part for me has been a sense of God’s presence during treatment. And having caught my cancer early was certainly a gift from God. I would encourage those of you who are on that journey of treatment and/or recovery to consider joining our group and sharing your story. When we pray together as Jesus has taught us, we can be assured that he is there with us.

Jack Bartle

Cancer Support at NRUMC
The NRUMC Cancer Support Group is a network of cancer patients, survivors, and caregivers that meets quarterly on Thursday evenings to pray, share resources, learn together, and support one another. If you are interested in joining the group or learning more, contact Ashley Will at associatепastor@nrumc.org or (919) 847-1536 x114.

I will go before you and level the uneven places; I will shatter the bronze doors and cut the iron bars in two. I will give you the treasures of darkness and riches from secret places, so that you may know that I, Yahweh, the God of Israel call you by your name. I call you by your name, because of Jacob My servant and Israel My chosen one. I give a name to you, though you do not know Me. I am Yahweh, and there is no other; there is no God but Me. I will strengthen you, though you do not know Me, so that all may know from the rising of the sun to its setting that there is no one but Me. I am Yahweh, and there is no other. I form light and create darkness, I make success and create disaster; I, Yahweh, do all these things.

–ISAIAH 45:2-7
The prison ministry at NRUMC supports programs seeking to help the convicted both in and out of prison. Equally important as visiting and guiding those behind bars is assisting these citizens’ reintegration back into society. A great need in North Carolina is transitional housing for returning citizens. The North Carolina Department of Public Safety (NCDPS) has transitional housing comprised of 92 male beds and 28 female beds across 8 counties. For most of these citizens returning to society, it’s “goodbye and good luck.”

Our prison ministry has recently partnered with Pardoned by Christ, a local Christian ministry. Pardoned by Christ’s purpose is to restore lives affected by incarceration: to provide practical and spiritual resources to those that would accept these provisions through Jesus Christ. Founder Mike Shank describes the overall atmosphere in the houses sponsored by this ministry as, “that of renewal and reconciliation in Christ. Residents are encouraged in their Christ identity and to live according to the Word of God. This is a new life for our residents...a life to live in Christ and in the power of the Holy Spirit.”

Pardoned by Christ has three transitional houses for men as part of its re-entry program. Men, whom volunteers get to know in prison through Bible study and fellowship programs, must apply and undergo an interview when they are ready for release. If all works out, a man is accepted into one of the houses. The ministry subsidizes room and board until each resident can support himself.

The pre-purchase inspection of a recently acquired house showed the front foundation wall to be below grade. The front yard and the driveway sloped, causing water to run directly into the front of the house and down to the front foundation wall. Financial assistance from our prison-designated funds sponsored the drainage repairs, including gutters, downspouts and French drains routing water to a natural area away from the house. Soil was brought in to correct the slope down to the foundation wall. Bushes were planted to absorb rainwater and enhance the appearance of the house. Pardoned by Christ also received a grant from the NRUMC Outreach Grants Committee to replace inoperable, energy inefficient windows. The new windows save on the electric bill and greatly improve the house’s appearance.

Many former residents have found rewarding careers. Yet finding full-time employment opportunities that can sustain independence for residents is an ongoing challenge for Pardoned by Christ. Lack of housing and employment are thought to be among the biggest contributors to recidivism (the tendency of a convicted criminal to re-offend). Pardoned by Christ’s recidivism rate is 8% where the national average is 56%.

North Raleigh UMC members can get involved changing lives at Pardoned by Christ in many ways including providing job opportunity information, participating in Bible studies, teaching life skills, and mentoring residents.

If you’d like to be part of helping someone cope with life in prison or becoming a productive member of society once again, contact Barbara Bays at bmbaysbus@gmail.com or call her at 919-601-2619.
Would you be surprised to learn that there exists a copy of the bulletin from the very first service held at North Raleigh United Methodist Church when it was meeting in its temporary location at Monk’s Chapel? Not many in our church realize that a small number of dedicated individuals perform an important, but relatively invisible task—preserving the history of NRUMC. Beyond bulletins, the History Committee is responsible for archiving everything that happens at our church. They make sure that important events, people, and ministry are documented for posterity.

Members of the church’s history committee meet twice each year to discuss ways to write about NRUMC’s history for that year and to review church documents and decide how best to preserve them. The committee compiles an annual yearbook, which contains all bulletins and newsletters for the year; articles about a special focus, such as the music ministry, small groups, children’s ministries, or youth ministries; and obituaries of members who have died that describe the deceased member’s participation in various ministries and programs of the church.

The North Raleigh United Methodist Archives is now located in the Conference Room on the lower level of the Sanctuary building. It was moved from the Music Office/Library in April 2018. Church historical materials, such as bulletins, newsletters, minutes, reports, maps, photographs, and building plans, are stored in locked cabinets. Stored records include all minutes of Church Councils (formerly the Administrative Board) and building committees, annual budgets, church officers, photographs and recordings of charter members, and a timeline from the church’s founding in 1971 until the present. Photographs are wrapped in bubble wrap to keep them from getting scratched.

Obviously, with the dawn of the computer age and a rapidly changing society that relies less and less on conventional record keeping, we are currently modifying our methods for archiving important records. Bulletins are now being saved as PDFs (portable document format), eliminating the need for larger storage, but retaining the flexibility of printing a copy if needed. Photographs, becoming entirely digital, will be copied to DVDs for storage along with the bulletin PDFs. These two changes alone will save considerable space, as well as reliably preserve valuable records for many, many years to come.

If you have an interest in preserving NRUMC’s history and would like to join the History Committee, email Brenda McLean at trolleyrneagle@aol.com or call her at 919.621.7391.
Another difference between spiritual directors and counselors/therapists is that they typically meet with a directee just once a month and are usually paid only a modest fee or honorarium for their services. Many directors charge a sliding scale fee so that a directee pays only what they can afford. This keeps the service affordable so that everyone who needs or desires spiritual direction can participate. Like counselors and therapists, directors are supervised and have a code of ethics to which they must adhere. Strict confidentiality is maintained so that anything shared with a spiritual director will never be shared with anyone else. Additionally, directors must participate in their own spiritual direction, and they are expected to engage in ongoing continuing education.

So with these basics in mind, here are some questions we asked our two spiritual directors…

Where and when did you complete your training?

Melissa:
I became a spiritual director after realizing I had a calling into some area of ministry, though I did not know what it was. One day I was reading a book by an author who described spiritual directors and what they do and I had the immediate and profound recognition that this

Many people in our church and even in the United Methodist denomination as a whole, are unfamiliar with the ministry of spiritual direction though it is widely known in the Catholic and Episcopalian traditions as a centuries old practice. It is a charism that is open to both clergy and lay people alike. Clergy often elect to become trained spiritual directors as a way of deepening their listening skills and because this ministry increases their awareness of and participation in prayer practices which are essential in ministry. Lay people are drawn for similar reasons. Spiritual direction is different from both counseling and therapy, but there are some overlaps. While counseling and therapy tend to be more problem solving and goal directed, spiritual direction is about the deep unfolding of the individual as it relates to their relationship with God. Spiritual directors are typically not very “directive” at all, thus the name is a bit of a misnomer. They can better be thought of as wise and discerning guides who are devoted to the transformational growth of the human who exists in a relationship with a loving God. The real work of spiritual direction is to open persons to their lives and attendant experiences with an eye towards strengthening their relationship with God.

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Where and when did you complete your training?

Melissa:
I became a spiritual director after realizing I had a calling into some area of ministry, though I did not know what it was. One day I was reading a book by an author who described spiritual directors and what they do and I had the immediate and profound recognition that this
was my calling. Within weeks I had found a program and enrolled. I spent three summer sessions in Harrisonburg, Virginia studying at the Eastern Mennonite Seminary and earned my certificate in spiritual formation in 2015. As so often happens, one thing leads to another, and as soon as I finished this program I was accepted into the Living School, which I completed in 2017. The Living School is a program designed to help students live consciously and contemplatively. There is a good deal of overlap between conscious living and spiritual direction, so the Living School attracts many pastors as well as spiritual directors.

Duke: I completed my training from the Spiritual Director’s Training Program, Sursum Corda, from the Episcopal Diocese of South Carolina. It was a two-year program from 1998–1999. It truly was a life changing experience.

Divinity school taught us just enough counseling to know that we were not really counselors. In a crisis, we were taught crisis counseling and then get them to a “real” counselor. I spent much of my early ministry doing just that. People would come to me and I would panic because I was not a counselor. I eventually realized that people were coming to a pastor for a reason, they were searching for God in the crisis. A friend had just completed the Sursum Corda and thought I would benefit as well, learning some skills in this ministry. I wanted to help people grow in God’s grace and love.

Ultimately, I went because I was searching, I wanted a deeper experience of God, I wanted to grow, I was hungry for such direction. I found a Spiritual Director and was blessed by that relationship. This searching spirit, along with the encouragement from my wife, Bettina, helped me make the decision to be trained.

What do you consider to be the primary benefit of a spiritual direction relationship for the average person?

Melissa: Spiritual direction is all about personal growth and transformation. Church attendance, Bible study, and service participation will carry people only so far. There comes a point in the spiritual journey where most people begin to question: “Is this all there is?” This is a normal phase in our development, but it’s easy to mistake it for a loss of faith or a disinterest in God, and it feels frustrating and scary when this happens. This is really all about God inviting us into a much deeper place where we are being asked to give up our props and learn how to live with God as near to us as our very breath. Spiritual directors are adept at handling every sort of crisis of faith and the many other issues that often arise as we attempt to imitate and follow Jesus. We are here to listen and to help people navigate the waters.

Duke: My spiritual director told me that spiritual direction is all about learning the language of the Holy Spirit. Each of us is unique and we each need to learn how we best “hear” the Holy Spirit, or “understand” how the Holy Spirit works within us.

The spiritual director listens for the Holy Spirit with the “directee.” The average person will be invited to “be still and know that I am God.” She/he will learn different forms of prayer practices and how he/she best prays to connect to God. Some people are head people and find God through reading and thinking. Some people are heart people and experience God through worship and emotion. Some are gut people and experience God in social action.

There are as many ways of prayer as there are people. Clarity, deepening love for God, and maturity are byproducts of spiritual direction. Hopefully, in spiritual direction, the scales will fall off our eyes and we’ll grow to see God everywhere and in all things.

What kinds of things would you tell someone they can expect to experience in a spiritual direction relationship?

Melissa: Spiritual direction is a ministry of deep listening. The main thing people experience in a spiritual direction relationship is that they feel deeply seen, heard, and understood. They may also begin to have the sense that God is very much present in their lives perhaps in ways that they have not seen or understood before. Spiritual direction is about helping people learn to see and sense how God is working in and through them.

Duke: The director will provide a safe place to practice spiritual direction and be present to God. The director commits to get out of the way and let the Spirit do what the Spirit will do. As a director, my focus and intention is to listen deeply and “get out of the way!”

Hopefully, a relationship is built that you can trust the spiritual director enough to say anything, absolutely anything! Being honest before God is critical, and in Spiritual Formation, having another person seeking to...
reflection: God’s love no matter what is being offered teaches us God’s loving presence.

How would you describe someone who might be ready for this kind of spiritual companionship? What are some of the signs that a person might need a spiritual director?

Melissa: Anyone who is restless, who is questioning, who feels trapped in some way by not being able to forgive or live in peace with others, anyone who feels that God is distant or unavailable to them, anyone who can’t pray, who feels stuck, or anyone just desiring something deeper that they cannot seem to name is ripe for spiritual direction. Usually it is a crisis of some kind that leads people to direction, but not always. Some people come because they just want more. They sense there is more. But they don’t know what it is or how to access it.

Duke: Richard Rohr has a book titled Falling Upward. I love that title, it indicates that spiritual growth takes place, not when we get it right, but when we get it wrong. When we reflect on their words as well as nonverbal cues and filter these carefully. As a result, she notices patterns in the director’s story, she is able to ask probing questions to help the directee uncover their issues. When a director is failure, when life turns our world upside down, when we feel frustration at work is seen through a new set of eyes and you’re a little more patient. Paul speaks of a “peace that passes all understanding.” An encounter with the living God changes a person. The situations you are facing may not change one iota, but because I recognize that the resurrected Christ is in my midst, I face the challenges with a new heart, a new set of eyes, a new attitude.

What role do prayer and other contemplative practices play in spiritual direction?

Melissa: Prayer is essential in this ministry. A director prays with, for, and over her directees. She does this before, during, and after their sessions, and in between. She will often introduce the directees to various prayer practices after listening to them, designed to specifically help them. For example, a director who struggles with being too reactive might be introduced to Welcoming Prayer. Anxious directees might benefit more from learning simple breath prayers. Spiritual directors are well versed in prayer practices and are good resources for people desiring a deeper and more fulfilling prayer life.

Duke: Spiritual direction is a practice that has a long history in the church, and we lost this tradition during the Age of Reason. We in the West have moved fully into our heads and our thinking. However, we are made for God. The world cares whether or not we look and act like Jesus. Spiritual direction helps people in their transformation journey so that they can begin to more clearly resemble Jesus.

What part do you see spiritual direction playing in the UMC’s mission statement of making disciples for the transformation of the world?

Melissa: Without personal change, there can be no hope of changing the world. Our inner selves must be first transformed before we can participate in the transformation of the world. People who have not tended to themselves and their issues first and foremost become people who go into the world concerned with the speck in the eyes of others without first removing the log in their own. Spiritual direction helps you remove the log. Change and growth are an inside job. The world outside our doors does not care about what we say we believe about Jesus. The world cares whether or not we look and act like Jesus. This is what draws people to Christ—when we ourselves look like him. Spiritual direction helps people in their transformation of the world.
Growing up Catholic, I was very hesitant to attend a women’s retreat because my faith is very personal to me. I have never been a person to outwardly discuss my faith with people that I do not know well, so last year I took a big leap and went to the women’s retreat. I was so glad I did, because I met some of the nicest, most accepting and kind women from NRUMC.

The name “Not Your Mama’s Women’s Retreat” alone is appropriate because I am one of those people that stereotypes retreats as something where it was quiet and all about reading the Bible strictly. The last two retreats could not have defied my stereotype more. First of all the setting alone is great, and I can best define it as one large slumber party with your best girlfriends. All of us sleep in one cabin with rooms full of bunk beds (a special thanks to Allison Dugan for being my roommate for the second year in a row AND sleeping on the top bunk). The rooms all open up to one large family room full of couches and there is a kitchen where all of us bring our favorite snacks to indulge in over the weekend. We read a wonderful book (Of Mess and Moxie by Jen Hatmaker) in advance of the retreat to discuss. The book made me laugh and feel like Jen knew me and what I am going through as a wife and mother. During the retreat, we discussed the book both in large and small groups, as it relates to our lives. I emphasize our lives because the retreat is about us—which some of us forget to talk about. When we are so used to talking about ourselves as wives, mothers, and other roles, we forget to talk about ourselves as individuals which alone is worth the whole weekend.

But the weekend is about fun too. We did everything from play board games, roast s’mores over a campfire, color, do crafts, and watch the UNC vs. Duke basketball game (which for me as an NC State fan was even fun because we laughed and cheered even though I did not know who to cheer for—sorry Veda and Joanne). We walked and saw the horses, played team-building games, and laughed and laughed. And do not even get me started on the food; it was amazing, five-star food. As I told the staff at the retreat, I would have been happy with peanut butter and jelly sandwiches all weekend since I did not have to cook but instead I was treated to the best pesto I have ever had and an amazing lasagna, when as an Italian I am a lasagna snob. From the fresh fruit and vegetables to the homemade desserts, I felt pampered, but the best part of each meal was being able to sit at one of three tables of friends from NRUMC, some new, some who I knew already, and laugh and cry and learn about each other. For someone that was nervous last year at the first women’s retreat to someone that was sad this year when it was over to someone who asked if we can do this twice a year, going to the women’s retreat is the best decision I have ever made and will continue to make year after year.
As I was preparing to pack for the second annual “Not Your Mama’s Retreat,” the same feelings of “why did I sign up for this?” start creeping in. My kids have multiple places to go this weekend. Can my husband manage by himself to get them there? I really should take this weekend to get some things done around the house or get the oil in my car changed. But I forge ahead as I have committed to be there and the book Of Mess and Moxie was a joy to listen to on Audible (no time for reading). As soon as I arrive late, we huddle together as a group of 18 women and I am reminded why I chose to be here. The sense of connection and kinship is why I love going on this retreat. In the book Of Mess and Moxie, the author talks about being “hope magnets,” discussing that we want to be that for our community and how we do that. During our time there (as well as when we returned), I believe we were “hope magnets” for each other. We discussed how this book relates to our lives and shared our stories. We got guidance from those who have passed through the same experiences, as well as just listened while someone shared the hardships or joys they’ve gone through. We worked in the midst of the mess...Nothing in your life is too dead for resurrection.” Think about how powerful that is...Nothing in your life—nothing—is too dead for resurrection. Wow. As if there wasn’t already the good news of God’s unconditional love, His forgiveness, and His grace...He gave us moxie, too!!

Over the weekend, we shared stories, walked the grounds, laughed, completed super-secret, mission-critical assignments together. And they were FUN. We bonded. We listened. We prayed. We were renewed.

Who could do all that in a short weekend? From my perspective, it just happened (make no mistake, there was serious planning, and we had world class expert leaders—Cassidy and Ashley—that made all of this happen). So, without having to plan a thing, except clearing my calendar for that weekend, all of these wonderful, beautiful, capable, amazing women shared their experiences, their opinions; they shared their hearts and filled our souls.

It is one of the ways we can pause, take a deep breath, be renewed so we can serve others, offer hope to others, do God’s will.

Hope to see you next year! Joanne Wise

Serious discussion wasn’t the only activity of the retreat. Coloring was enjoyed by all (right), and putting together puzzles (one of assorted chocolates, of course) was a great way to wind down during recreational free time (opposite page).

Meg Clark

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Meg Clark

After the usual hectic and demanding week, we set off on Friday for a relaxing women’s retreat. I was excited by the (unspoken) promise of escape from the craziness of discussing a hilarious and relate-able book (Of Mess and Moxie), of getting to know women in the church in a wear-your-comfies, have beach hair, eat-a-second-snack-if-you-want-to environment. The promise delivered!

We talked about having “moxie”—being able to overcome, persevere, endure. It means we can find happiness, joy, accomplishment and encouragement even though we’ve experienced failure and suffering, and maybe more than once.

In between games, puzzles, talking, eating good food that we didn’t have to prepare (!), we learned that no matter what disappointment, heartbreak, failure, or suffering we experience, God gives us the spirit to overcome, to start again, to be renewed—like the resurrection. I think Cassidy said, “It isn’t an accident that we observe the Resurrection every year. We have to be reminded that God is always bringing new love for us, new life.” The author of the book, Jen Hatmaker, said, “Embrace the moxie in the midst of the mess...Nothing in your life is too dead for resurrection.” Think about how powerful that is...Nothing in your life—nothing—is too dead for resurrection. Wow. As if there wasn’t already the good news of God’s unconditional love, His forgiveness, and His grace...He gave us moxie, too!!

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Meg Clark

After the usual hectic and demanding week, we set off on Friday for a relaxing women’s retreat. I was excited by the (unspoken) promise of escape from the craziness of discussing a hilarious and relate-able book (Of Mess and Moxie), of getting to know women in the church in a wear-your-comfies, have beach hair, eat-a-second-snack-if-you-want-to environment. The promise delivered!

We talked about having “moxie”—being able to overcome, persevere, endure. It means we can find happiness, joy, accomplishment and encouragement even though we’ve experienced failure and suffering, and maybe more than once.

In between games, puzzles, talking, eating good food that we didn’t have to prepare (!), we learned that no matter what disappointment, heartbreak, failure, or suffering we experience, God gives us the spirit to overcome, to start again, to be renewed—like the resurrection. I think Cassidy said, “It isn’t an accident that we observe the Resurrection every year. We have to be reminded that God is always bringing new love for us, new life.” The author of the book, Jen Hatmaker, said, “Embrace the moxie in the midst of the mess...Nothing in your life is too dead for resurrection.” Think about how powerful that is...Nothing in your life—nothing—is too dead for resurrection. Wow. As if there wasn’t already the good news of God’s unconditional love, His forgiveness, and His grace...He gave us moxie, too!!

Over the weekend, we shared stories, walked the grounds, laughed, completed super-secret, mission-critical assignments together. And they were FUN. We bonded. We listened. We prayed. We were renewed.

Who could do all that in a short weekend? From my perspective, it just happened (make no mistake, there was serious planning, and we had world class expert leaders—Cassidy and Ashley—that made all of this happen). So, without having to plan a thing, except clearing my calendar for that weekend, all of these wonderful, beautiful, capable, amazing women shared their experiences, their opinions; they shared their hearts and filled our souls.

It is one of the ways we can pause, take a deep breath, be renewed so we can serve others, offer hope to others, do God’s will.

Hope to see you next year! Joanne Wise

Serious discussion wasn’t the only activity of the retreat. Coloring was enjoyed by all (right), and putting together puzzles (one of assorted chocolates, of course) was a great way to wind down during recreational free time (opposite page).
As I sit and write this article for our magazine, we find ourselves as a denomination in the aftermath of The Way Forward Special Session of the General Conference. I remarked to one of my friends recently that The Way Forward has rather more resembled The Road to Nowhere. In my opinion, little has been resolved. Yes, a proposal was passed, but we do not even know if it can or will be implemented. At least two thirds of our U.S. delegates took exception to the ruling and supported the One Church Plan. It also seems to me that since the conference ended, the hardening of positions and entrenchment on each side has actually increased.

Because of my background and the kind of work that I do, I am prone to inward reflection, pondering, and questioning all events of significance which occur around me. I search for meanings, patterns, connections between the dots. As I have reflected and pondered with an open-hearted posture these events at the General Conference, several things have begun to crystallize for me. Probably the clearest insight I have had is that as a body, we are going about this in a way that has not, and will not, yield a real and lasting solution. Hear me out.

We have allowed ourselves to become caught up in the political machinations of attempting to create change (or preserving the status quo in the case of the traditionalists) by creating winners and losers, by attempting to corral power, by attempting to orchestrate votes—in short—by responding in the ways of the world. This is how our political system works, and you don’t have to look very far at all to see how broken that system is. So why are we imitating it? Why are we using a broken system in an attempt to usher in a new day in the church? Albert Einstein once said that you cannot solve a problem with the same consciousness that created it. Smart man, that one.

The issue here is not who can garner the most votes, who holds the correct biblical interpretation, or the idea that we can somehow legislate the parameters of the church in its quest to be accepting and loving towards all of God’s children. The real issue is our hardened hearts. The real issue is a lot of junk and detritus in our subconscious minds, along with the unchallenged assumptions we all hold that need to be dragged out into the daylight, and ultimately examined and transcended. My teacher, Father Richard Rohr, reminds his students regularly: “What you do not transcend, you transmit.” I see an awful lot of transmission of pain and highly-defended egoic operating going on within the church on both sides, each claiming to know precisely who God is and precisely what God wants. Where has our humility gone? How can we, the created, even begin to think that we have the mind and the views of the Transcendent One, The God of the Universe, wrapped up and reducible to something that can easily be distilled

The greatest need of our time is to clean out the enormous mass of mental and emotional rubbish that clutters our minds and makes of all political and social life a mass illness. Without this housecleaning we cannot begin to see.

Thomas Merton
Conjectures of a Guilty Bystander
into bullet points arguing for or against anything? This reeks of arrogance to me. And arrogance is not a trait that followers of Jesus are invited to emulate.

Which brings me to Jesus and his own consciousness. The Rev. Dr. Cynthia Bourgeault, an Episcopal priest and renowned wisdom teacher, has written extensively on the subject of the non-dual nature of the consciousness of Jesus. Jesus, she argues, is the very first non-dual teacher to arise in the west. By this she means that he was single and undivided: that he was able to hold within himself various tensions between the here and now, and the there and then; of illumination and shadow; of stillness and action; of resistance and surrender. In short, Jesus was able to see from a field of the unified whole. He excluded nothing. This is the consciousness allowing him to eat with sinners, to heal on the Sabbath, to speak with a woman at a well who was notorious in her community. The unified field of his vision and the wisdom this produced allowed him to see the bigger picture, which frankly did not go down too well with the religious authorities of his day any better than it does today. And the invitation Jesus offers us is to come and follow him. He invites us to share the same sort of consciousness He himself exhibits, to engage with a hurting world the way He does, to love the broken in the way that He does.

So my invitation and challenge to the church is that instead of trying to legislate our way out of our present difficulties, that we would begin to address the core issues, the root causes of our dysfunction which are creating pain and causing division. And the core issue is us. There is an old song called “Let There Be Peace on Earth.” I remember singing it as a middle school child many years ago. “Let there be peace on earth, and let it begin with me.” All peace first begins with me. It begins with you. It is found in Christ if we would but dare to open our hearts to receive it and allow it to transform us. Shalom.

Melissa Auten is a member of NRUMC and a spiritual director whose work focuses on contemplative practices as a means of personal transformation. She is a graduate of the Rohr Living School. For more information, please feel free to contact her at auten.melissa@yahoo.com.

What you do not transcend, you transmit.

Father Richard Rohr

An Update from the Disaster Recovery Team

The following is an email reprinted here with permission from Gordon Bell, one of our Disaster Recovery Team coordinators at NRUMC.

Good morning Volunteers,

Thank you all for your continued support of the Hurricane Florence victims. This has been the eighth Hurricane Florence Disaster Response Trip that you all have made possible by your dedication and by putting your faith to work as disciples of Christ! This trip we installed laminate flooring in the house of the Malhotra family. They are a family of four and have been living in their home as it has been repaired and were sleeping on mattresses on the floor when we arrived. We were able to install the floor in two bedrooms upstairs and all of the downstairs enabling them to set up their bedrooms and living area again. I could not count the number of times they thanked us. The father, Amit, was able to work from home while we were there and became an expert at laying laminate floor as he worked side by side with the team. On Saturday his wife and children joined in to help after their son’s soccer game that morning. We put in some extra time on Saturday and quit work at 5:00, tired but happy that we were able to help this wonderful family.

Of course it wasn’t all work and no play. The Good Lord blessed us with beautiful weather and we dined in some of the great places that Beaufort has to offer. We watched some good basketball and had great fellowship in the comfort of the waterfront condos of Johnny Watkins and Jack Spence.

I can’t thank the following volunteers enough for all of their hard work and dedication: Jack Spence, John Watkins, Agge Scruggs, Woody Teague, Phil Shafer, and Gordon Osborne.

Special thanks to Rhonda & Lyle Gardner and Debbie & Johnny Watkins for letting us use their condos.

Gordon Bell

nrumc.org/disaster-recovery-team
We give thanks for all God has already given you and we welcome you in Christian love. As members together with you in the body of Christ and in this congregation of the United Methodist Church, we renew our covenant faithfully to participate in the ministries of the Church by our prayers, our presence, our gifts, our service, and our witness, that in everything God may be glorified through Jesus Christ.

Will you nurture these persons in Christ’s holy Church, that by your teaching and example they may be guided to accept God’s grace for themselves, to profess their faith openly, and to lead a Christian life?

With God’s help we will proclaim the good news and live according to the example of Christ. We will surround these persons with a community of love and forgiveness, that they may grow in their trust of God, and be found faithful in their service to others. We will pray for them, that they may be true disciples who walk in the way that leads to life.

This is the promise that we make as a congregation to support and encourage all individuals who join North Raleigh United Methodist Church. We agree to work together for the transformation of the world. On Mother’s Day, our congregation received 25 new young members. These students spent the past seven months in Confirmation classes learning about their faith and forming their own theology. These new members are not the church of the future. They are today’s church!

So how will we as their church family fulfill our promises to them and with them? We reach out!

There is pretty impressive youth ministry research that defines true relational ministry with the ratio of five to one. It states that it takes five adults showing up and engaging with each individual student in order for that student to fully connect to the church for the long run. The sad statistics are that three fifths of students who grow up in the church will not return to the church of their youth as adults. It’s our job to help them “catch the faith” and show them that the church of today needs them now. They are gifted and called and truly capable. And, after all, we made a promise to them.

Our goal should be to live the way Paul described to Timothy in 1 Thessalonians 2:8 “We cared so deeply that we were delighted to share with you not only the gospel of God, but our own lives as well. That is how beloved you have become to us.”

The gift of our time and attention is the biggest gift we can give. Like all of us, our youth are still learning what it means to be Christian in our world and our daily lives. We have promised to show them through our lives and actions all the different ways we can faithfully follow Christ and to learn along with them how to be better disciples. This won’t happen if we keep our ministries separate and don’t teach one another and learn from one another.

If you don’t know how to get started or with who – ask our youth ministry leaders! Any one of them would love to talk to you (and talk your ear off!) about “our kids”. Yes, they’ll tell you how great the students are, but they’ll also tell you that today’s youth have major struggles. Let them help show you how you can get involved and make a difference. Our youth have things to teach you too! Don’t believe me? Ask any of our small group leaders...
Our youth are full-fledged members of the church of right now and we need them. We want to challenge you this year to reach out to one or two students. Maybe there are students you already know who might share your interests. Invite them to join you in serving! Ask them to join you in making cookies for College Connections. See if they could help you teach a children’s Sunday school class or work on a special event for the children. Grab a couple of them to help you clean out a shed or a closet for a few hours then take them to Jubala to get to know each other better. Ask them to attend a UMM or UMW event as your guest. See if they can be photographers at your events or help you set up an Instagram account. Ask them to join you in a volunteer activity you love, whether it is at the church or outside it like working at the Food Bank. Invite them to come with you to support the Alleluia performance that the kids are doing. Show that you see them as individuals who have their own worth as a member of the body of Christ – not as kids we applaud and then dismiss as too young to be really involved or be in leadership in our church ...

Also, attend their events! Come to a Creative Ministries performance and cheer them on. Volunteer at a Graduation Celebration dinner and show them that the adults in the church are there for them too. Come to youth group and join them even when you can even if you can’t be a leader...
regularly. Attend their sports events and plays to support their community activities. Show that you value them for their gifts too. Ask our youth ministry staff about where you can plug in and make an impact in the life of a youth.

We want to say thank you to all who have been involved in the youth ministry this year, especially as we have been in transition. We had members of the United Methodist Men who were “luggage runners” for Big Idea registration. Several of the United Methodist Women’s circles have surrounded our youth with special gifts for retreats that remind them how much they are loved. Our most recent Big Idea retreat had no less than forty seven adults involved in the planning, serving, and leadership to make this retreat possible for 85 kids. It truly takes a village and we have such a wonderful one here.

On May 12th in the 11:15 service, 25 young people stood in front of our congregation and professed their faith in God and their love for Jesus Christ. Together, we promised to support them and join them in recommitting ourselves faithfully to participate in the ministries of the Church by our prayers, our presence, our gifts, our service, and our witness, that in everything God may be glorified through Jesus Christ.

Let’s live our promise!

Written by the 2019 Youth Ministry Council
Jen Haselden, James Hucke, Kirsten Ioos, Geoff Mueller, John Owen, Kelly Schoch, Karrn Reed, and Madison Mueller

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The Five-Year Vision of NRUMC

The hopes and dreams of North Raleigh members are the inspiration for our new five-year vision. The vision, created from nearly forty pages of input gathered from over 380 church members in 2018, is focused on development in three key areas: engagement, worship & service, and investment.

The focus on engagement is designed to help North Raleigh members get more involved in spiritual formation to grow as disciples of Christ. Worship & service examines new worship opportunities and connects how we are formed in worship to how members serve in the community. Investment focuses on how the church will provide adequate resources for ministry and responsibly manage debt.

The five-year vision is being implemented by the Church Council through the new Ministry Action Plan 3.0 (MAP 3.0). Nearly 100 church members are already at work on implementation teams to make the vision become a reality. These teams are coordinated by the Church Council and advised by the Long-Range Planning Team. And, speaking of the Long Range-Planning Team, they continue to discuss and dream with church members about how North Raleigh will grow even beyond our current five-year vision.

No one can predict the future but the leadership of North Raleigh is taking intentional steps in partnership with church membership to walk boldly into the unknown. Careful planning, wise decision-making, and a creative and courageous attitude will help us all respond to Christ’s call in ways that bear fruit and grow the kingdom of God.

Alan Felton
ENCOURAGING PEOPLE ON THEIR JOURNEY TO DISCOVER EXTRAORDINARY LIFE IN CHRIST

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